

He's 31—and starts out on a pro career

WHAT is the difference between top-class amateur internationals and Third Division football? That is the question that has been thrown up recently by the news that Bournemouth, big money spenders, have persuaded John Delaney—for three years a regular England amateur

international, to move to Dean Court.

To many people, a 31-year-old player—even if he is with one of the country's top amateur outfits, Wycombe

Wanderers, should be thinking about retirement, not embarking on a belated professional career.

But not Delaney, who has travelled the world as centre-half with the England amateur squad, and has 17 caps to his credit.

Said Delaney: "Third Division requirements are no greater than those you meet at amateur international level. I do as much training as Bournemouth players do. At Wycombe we train two evenings a week, play two matches a week and when you are in the England squad there is extra training on Sundays.

"There are players in the international squad who are easily as good as the pros."

Bournemouth manager John Bond was one of those who underestimated the top class amateur standards—until his first team were beaten 2-1 by Wycombe in a friendly.

"We were due to play their first team a few weeks ago, but they had another engagement so John Bond sent up their youth team instead. We beat them 10-0. I gather he decided to teach us a lesson so he brought his full first team up soon after," said Delaney.

"We beat them as well,

their goal being an own goal in the last few minutes, so it was never that close."

Bond saw enough that night to make an immediate approach for Delaney, deciding he could be just the man to draft into his defence. Something like a second Tony Book. But Delaney would rather not be compared with the veteran Manchester City defender.

The fact that he is 31 does not worry him. "I feel I have been playing better than at any time in my career this season. There are lots of players whose best years are between 30 and 36," he said.

Delaney has turned down professional offers in the past, notably from Reading, who also offered him the captaincy of their side.

"Bournemouth have offered me a lot more money, Reading's offer was not in the same class. Bournemouth impressed me as a well-organised club with a nice set-up," he said.

Delaney does not officially become a professional until July 1, but he declined an offer to go on the England amateur European tour. He had too much to do uprooting his family from their Slough home and moving to Hampshire.



JOHN DELANEY holds up the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup, the last of many honours he won as an amateur